# 1 Why Write a Plan?

## NEED FOR THIS PLAN

Wildland fire has long been recognized as one of the most significant natural processes operating within and shaping Sierra Nevada ecosystems. Virtually all vegetation communities show evidence of fire dependence or tolerance. At the same time wildland fire has the potential to threaten human lives and property. Consequently there is a need to manage wildland fire so that threats to humans and property are reduced, while at the same time restoring and/or maintaining its function as a natural process.

Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks have written this *Fire and Fuels Management Plan* to provide long- term direction for achieving park goals related to human safety and ecosystem management. The plan also satisfies the requirements and direction provided in policy, legislative authority, park purpose statements, higher- level planning documents, and natural and cultural resource management objectives. Each one of these components is discussed below.

**Policy**

National Park Service policy, articulated in *Directors Order 18 - Wildland Fire Management* (1998) and *Reference Manual- 18* (1999), require that all parks with vegetation capable of supporting fire develop a fire management plan.

Other program direction comes from the National Fire Plan (based on *Managing the Impact of Wildfires on Communities and the Environment, A Report to the President in Response to the Wildfires of 2000*), and the 10- Year Comprehensive Strategy (*A Collaborative Approach for Reducing Wildland Fire Risks to Communities and the Environment*).

Policy also directs Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks to work cooperatively with their adjacent land management and fire management agencies to implement mutually beneficial projects and programs. This plan provides guidance not only for park staff, but also the parks' neighbors. With clearly stated program goals and objectives, the parks' neighbors will be better able to comment on park planning efforts and provide technical assistance.

**Legislative Authority**

Authority for carrying out a fire and fuels management program originates with the Organic Act of the National Park System, August 25, 1916. This Act states that the primary goal of the National Park Service is to preserve and protect the natural and cultural resources found on lands under its management in such manner as will leave them unimpaired for future generations. Additional authorities for fire management activities include: 31 U.S. Code 665 (E) (1) (B) which provides the authority to exceed appropriations due to wildland fire management activities; Section 302 (c) (2) of the Federal Property Administration Services Act of 1949, as amended; and Chapter VIII of the 1983 Supplemental Appropriations Act (P.L. 97- 257) which

deals with contracting for fire protection; and The Reciprocal Fire Protection Act, Act of May 27, 1955 (42 U.S.C. 1856) that authorizes reciprocal agreements with federal, state, and other wildland fire protection organizations.

**Purpose of Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks**

Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks protect a variety of landscapes containing biological and cultural resources in the southern Sierra Nevada of California. They are two separate national parks that were created by acts of Congress fifty years apart. Today these parks are administered as a single unit. Primary purposes of the two parks as expressed in legislation are to preserve the forest resources, particularly the giant sequoia groves, and to protect a vast wilderness for both its scenic and recreational values.

Established September 25, 1890, Sequoia National Park is the second oldest national park in the United States. The campaign to create the park focused on the giant sequoia groves (*Sequoiadendron giganteum*). The October 1, 1890 act also created four- square- mile General Grant National Park to protect the General Grant Tree and surrounding forest.

Since 1890, Sequoia National Park has undergone two major enlargements, both of which added high Sierra lands to the park. In 1926, Congress added the Great Western Divide, Kern headwaters, and Sierra Crest regions. This enlargement, which more than doubled the park's acreage, made it clear that Sequoia National Park would be not only a forest park, but also an alpine park. Included within the enlargement was Mt. Whitney, the highest mountain in the contiguous United States. In 1978, Congress again enlarged Sequoia National Park, this time adding the Mineral King area to the park, which previously had been a part of the Sequoia National Forest. Congress added the basin to the national park with the specific instruction that it would be preserved undeveloped. In 2000, the park was further expanded with the addition of the Dillonwood Grove, a private tract of sequoia grove adjacent to the park's southern boundary within the Tule watershed. Today, the best known and most appreciated features of Sequoia National Park remain the sequoia groves and the high country.

The small General Grant National Park existed unchanged for fifty years. Then in 1940 Congress created Kings Canyon National Park. In addition to incorporating the four square miles of General Grant National Park and several other adjacent sequoia groves, Kings Canyon National Park also featured the great glacial canyons and scenic alpine headwaters of the South and Middle Forks of the Kings River. Because the new park contained two separate tracts, one featuring giant sequoia trees and the other canyons and alpine scenery, Kings Canyon's dual nature was readily apparent from the beginning. In 1940, as a political compromise, the floors of the park's two great glacial canyons were left outside its boundaries as possible reservoir sites. This situation was resolved in 1965 when Congress added the floors of Kings Canyon and Tehipite Valley to the park.

Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks contain resources of geological, biological, cultural, and sociological value. In addition to national park status, the two reservations have also been designated as a unit of the International Biosphere Preserve Program, and 85% of the parks have been designated wilderness. For a detailed description of park resources, please see Chapter 8.

## Relationship to Higher- Level Planning Documents

### Environmental Assessment

The program described in this plan was developed following guidelines and requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act and National Historic Preservation Act. A companion *Environmental Assessment* (EA) provides details on the alternatives considered, and an environmental assessment of the actions described in this document. Any user of this plan must become thoroughly familiar with the EA to fully understand the context and expected impact of the actions implemented by this plan.

### Master Plan/General Management Plan

The parks *Master Plan* (1971) provides the primary direction for management of natural resources in these parks. The *Master Plan* expresses natural resource goals in a general way but does not provide detailed implementation strategies. The parks' *Master Plan* is currently undergoing major revision and will become a *General Management Plan* (GMP). The expected completion date for the GMP is 2004. Once that plan is completed, the *Fire and Fuels Management Plan* will be reviewed for conformity with the GMP. If there are discrepancies between the two plans, the GMP direction will take precedence and this plan will be amended to comply.

The *Master Plan* (pg. 10) states that *"fire has been an important element in the environment of this locality since time immemorial. Fire, therefore, should be restored to its natural role in the environment. However, an efficient organization must be maintained to prevent and contain fires that may endanger human life and property."*

There are three objectives of the parks' *Master Plan* that pertain to fire management:

- *Coordinate research and management efforts to identify and apply actions necessary to restore and/or perpetuate desirable environmental conditions as contemplated in the policies for management of natural areas.*
- *Natural science research is and will continue to be an important activity in these parks and will be encouraged.*
- *Fire and other natural agents must be skillfully restored to the park ecosystems. Restoration of natural environmental processes is particularly essential in the sequoia groves, high mountain meadows, and some lakes and streams.*

### Wilderness Plan

The parks currently manage wilderness areas under a *Backcountry Management Plan*. That plan will be replaced by a *Wilderness Management Plan* some time after the *General Management Plan* is final. As with the GMP, once the *Wilderness Management Plan* is complete, the *Fire and Fuels Management Plan* will be reviewed for conformity. If there are discrepancies between the two plans, the *Wilderness Management Plan* will take precedence and the *Fire and Fuels Management Plan* will be amended to comply.

### Strategic Plan

The parks' *Strategic Plan* outlines specific actions that the parks expect to take to fulfill parkwide goals and objectives. As such, that plan will include specific annual and long term objectives and actions described in the *Resource Management Plan* and *Fire and Fuels Management Plan*.

**Natural and Cultural Resources Management Plan**
The *Natural and Cultural Resources Management Plan* (RMP) (1999) translates general direction provided in the *Master Plan* (or GMP) into more specific direction and recommendations for management of park resources. Actions detailed in the *Fire and Fuels Management Plan* respond to and help fulfill resource management objectives articulated in the RMP.

The primary resource management goal for fire management is contained in Mission Goal Ia. It states that "*natural and cultural resources and associated values are protected, restored, maintained in good condition, and managed within their broader ecosystem and cultural context.*"

To accomplish the mission goal, the following actions are recommended:

**Vegetation**
- Native plants are preserved as part of natural functioning ecosystems
- The giant sequoia groves – particularly Giant Forest – and the ecosystems they occupy are restored, maintained, and protected.
- Plant communities that have been altered by fire suppression are restored/maintained through restoration of the natural fire regime to the maximum extent possible.
- Vegetation in the parks' Development Zone is restored and/or maintained as a healthy, vigorous vegetative community that approximates the "natural" state, given the constraints of past and present human intervention, while providing a safe environment for human use and enjoyment.

**Aquatic/Water**
- Aquatic and water ecosystems are restored and/or maintained so that physical, chemical, and biotic processes function uninfluenced by human activities
- A long- term monitoring program is developed to record ambient conditions and to document changes and trends in physical and chemical characteristics and biotic communities.
- Changes within the aquatic environments that are caused by facilities, management activities, or visitor use patterns are located and documented and unnatural changes are mitigated to the extent feasible.

**Wildlife**
- Natural populations of wildlife in which animal behavior and ecological processes are essentially unaltered by human activities are perpetuated
- Native animal species and threatened/endangered and sensitive animal species are inventoried, monitored, protected, and restored/maintained over time.

**Air Resources**
- Air quality is restored to natural conditions
- Impacts and levels of park air pollution are monitored.

**Knowledge about Park Natural Resources**
- Knowledge of the state of the parks' natural resources continues to grow

- Scientific research that promotes an understanding of the parks' resources and the impacts that affect those resources is encouraged.
- The general ecosystem elements and processes of the parks, the natural forces controlling them, and the potential for human activities to affect them is increasingly understood.

**Prehistoric and Historic Archeological Sites**
- Actions are taken to protect threatened or adversely impacted significant sites from threats or on- going impacts.

**Historic Structures**
- Actions are taken to protect threatened or adversely impacted historic structures from threats or on- going impacts.

**Cultural Landscapes**
- Actions are taken to protect threatened or adversely impacted significant cultural landscapes from threats or on- going impacts.

**Knowledge about Park Cultural Resources**
- Knowledge of the state of the parks' cultural resources continues to grow
- Scientific research that promotes a better understanding of the parks' cultural resources and museum collections is encouraged.

**California State Air Quality Planning**
Actions taken under this plan will conform to the limits and requirements of the *State Implementation Plan* for attainment of National Ambient Air Quality Standards. Projects implemented under this plan will conform to the legal and procedural requirements of the San Joaquin Valley Unified Air Pollution Control District. Annual and project level plans that involve the use of fire will be reviewed by the District and implemented after consultation with the District. Procedures for District review and permitting, and for implementation of Best Available Control Methods (BACM) are found in Appendix J.

## WHAT THIS PLAN WILL DO

Based on the authorities and direction explained above, this plan provides a detailed description of how Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks will organize and implement its fire and fuels management program. The *Fire and Fuels Management Plan* will:

1. Provide overall program direction by stating mission, goals, and objectives.
2. Describe fire and fuels management tools, prescriptions, and operational procedures.
3. Designate and describe fire management zones, planning units, and segments.
4. Describe planning procedures.
5. Provide guidance on the protection of sensitive resources.
6. Describe the fire and fuels management organization structure.
7. Highlight the importance of safety.
8. Summarize the historical role of fire in the parks and the current wildland fire situation.

The *Fire and Fuels Management Plan* undergoes periodic review as part of a continuing refinement process. The Plan will be reviewed annually and amended as needed to comply with changing policy, law, and circumstances. Topics considered for revision are discussed each spring during the annual fire and fuels management review. Revisions will be made in accordance with DO- 18 Wildland Fire Management and RM- 18 Wildland Fire Management Reference Manual.

Amendments will be evaluated by the park Environmental Management Committee (EMC) to determine whether the actions described in the amendment require further environmental compliance. Environmental assessments will be prepared for actions that are not covered under the companion *Environmental Assessment* for this plan or are exceptions to categorical exclusions contained in Directors Order 12 - Conservation Planning, Environmental Impact Analysis, and Decision- making.